

# CO-OPERATION

*Building Capacity and Confidence  
in Northern Ireland*

CO-OPERATION IRELAND WAS ESTABLISHED WITH THE GOAL OF BUILDING BETTER ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL LINKAGES BETWEEN THE PEOPLE OF NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND. WITH SUPPORT FROM THE IRELAND FUNDS, CO-OPERATION IRELAND FOUNDED THE LEGASI (LEARNING, ENGAGEMENT, GROWTH AND SUCCESSION INTERVENTION) LEADERSHIP WHICH IS NOW ADDRESSING THE FRAGILE INFRASTRUCTURE WITHIN PROTESTANT UNIONIST LOYALIST (PUL) COMMUNITIES TO EMPOWER THEM TO CREATE AND BUILD A POSITIVE FUTURE. HERE, CEO PETER SHERIDAN, SHARES THE FIRST FRUITS OF THAT INVESTMENT BY THE IRELAND FUNDS.



# IRELAND



H & W

"SAMSON AND GOLIATH" ARE THE ICONIC HARLAND & WOLFF SHIPBUILDING CRANES AT QUEEN'S ISLAND, BELFAST. ONCE THE HEART OF BELFAST'S SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRY, THEY REMAIN SOME OF BELFAST'S MOST RECOGNIZABLE SYMBOLS.

H & W



BY PETER SHERIDAN, *Chief Executive, Co-operation Ireland*

AS THE FOREMOST PEACE-BUILDING ORGANIZATION IN IRELAND, THE CHARITY CO-OPERATION IRELAND HAS BEEN LEADING THE WAY IN IMPROVING RELATIONS BETWEEN THE MAIN CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT COMMUNITIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND FOR NEARLY 40 YEARS.

Its work complements many of the objectives set by the Northern Ireland Executive in their Fresh Start Agreement. One of its key elements highlights the Executive's aims of supporting those people who are determined to make the transition away from paramilitarism. An example of a Co-operation Ireland project seeking to do this is the LEGaSI Project.

For the past 18 months, the LEGaSI team has created a project which aims to increase and strengthen the capacity of working class

Protestant, Unionist and Loyalist communities in Northern Ireland through the provision of learning and skills development opportunities.

Funded by a \$1 million Flagship investment from The Ireland Funds, the LEGaSI project is now taking an innovative approach to working with these working class communities, who are acknowledged to have a poorer level of social development than their Catholic neighbors, resulting in lower levels of political engagement and social cohesion in these communities.

The financial support from The Ireland Funds has enabled us to develop practical peace-building initiatives and this program effectively illustrates this approach. LEGaSI, whilst still in its infancy has been extremely successful in building the capacity and confidence of many Protestant communities as well as being influential in building bridges with the Catholic community.

In collaboration with a wide spectrum of organizations, the LEGaSI team has created a variety of 'islands', that reflect the learning needs of the community. Participants select those islands they need more knowledge of and with this knowledge participants can develop a vision for their community and become agents of change in their own communities.

To date, islands on crowd funding, law and order, public speaking and the media have been hugely popular. Participants have particularly welcomed the fact they have been able to talk directly to those organizations that make decisions about their communities. Both the police and the Parades Commission, which makes determinations on many controversial parades in Northern Ireland, have taken part and were able to discuss the processes they adhere to when making decisions on sensitive parades.





This is just one of many programs Co-operation Ireland is involved with. In 2015 Co-operation Ireland, through the National Citizen Service project, gave hundreds of young people the opportunity to engage in voluntary activities, while our more targeted Youth Leadership program has up-skilled many young people so they can become leaders of the future.

On 21 September, 2016, to mark the International Day of Peace, Co-operation Ireland will bring up to 5,000 school children to the Eikon Exhibition Centre situated at the recently redeveloped H Blocks/Maze prison site, and allow them to assert their hope for a peaceful future. During the day, pupils from hundreds of primary and secondary schools will present their peace pledges as well as performing a range of dramatic and musical pieces, which have been written by the young people specifically for the day.

Co-operation Ireland is committed to peace-building on the island of Ireland and we will continue to deliver innovative programs which challenge people's thinking and attitudes. Support we receive from The Ireland Funds for LEGaSI highlights what can be achieved with funding that allows for more creativity and input from the people the programs aim to help.



*"I was able to use what I had learned in a previous island when applying to the Parades Commission for a parade in our area. I was able to tell others about the role of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) in regards to these matters, because a lot of people think that they (PSNI) have the final say and that damages relationships with them."*

*—A LEGaSI participant*

THANKS TO THE LEGASI PROJECT, PARADE COMMISSIONERS HAVE MET WITH THE COMMUNITY TO DEMYSTIFY THE PROCESS AND PROTOCOLS OF THE SENSITIVE NORTHERN IRELAND EVENTS.

